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THU JAN 30, 2014 AT 10:28 AM PST

Waxman retirement reflects end of era of effective Congress

Joan McCarter

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The announcement today from Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) that he will **retire after this year** threatens to end an era of an effective, aggressive, public service-minded House of Representatives. The list of **Waxman's accomplishments** is legion. But **here are a few** that he highlights in his statement.

"I took on the pharmaceutical companies that did not want competition and joined with Senator Orrin Hatch to write the law that created the generic drug industry, saving families over \$1 trillion in the last decade alone. My orphan drug legislation led to treatments for hundreds of rare diseases.

"My investigations into the tobacco industry called the CEOs to account and exposed the industry's duplicity. After more than a decade of effort, President Obama signed into law my legislation to give FDA jurisdiction over tobacco products. [...]

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I spoke out early to raise public awareness about HIV/AIDS, holding over 30 hearings to draw attention to a disease no one wanted to discuss. These efforts culminated in the passage of the Ryan White CARE Act, the law that provides medical care and services to Americans living with HIV/AIDS. [...]

"Expanding health coverage to those in need has been one of my driving passions. In the 1980s, I led the fight to expand Medicaid, providing health coverage to millions of low-income children, pregnant women, and seniors. In the 1990s, I worked with Senator Ted Kennedy to provide coverage to the children of working families through the Children's Health Insurance Program.

"And in 2010, when I was chair of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, one of my lifelong dreams was finally achieved: Congress passed the Affordable Care Act, which guarantees access to affordable health coverage to all Americans.

Waxman takes his pledge as a public servant as seriously as any person who has held elected office. He used his position first as chair of the Health and Environment Subcommittee and then the full Energy and Commerce Committee to conduct investigations on the issues that mattered most to the health and safety of Americans. He uncovered abuses by industry and has been instrumental in just about every piece of public health legislation that became law in the past four decades.

Waxman says he is "not leaving out of frustration with Congress." At the same time, he says "I abhor the extremism of the Tea Party Republicans. I am embarrassed that the greatest legislative body in the world too often operates in a partisan intellectual vacuum, denying science, refusing to listen to experts, and ignoring facts." To wit, consider the kinds of oversight hearings we seen from this Republican Congress, the vast majority of which are barely disguised political witch hunts, intent on manufacturing scandals where none exist to inflict political damage on the administration and the Democratic party. Public service—the hallmark of Waxman's long career—has been put aside by the Republican majority.

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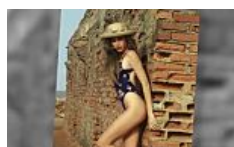
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